

reducing gas (abstract)."

For at least this reason, claim 1 and the claims that depend therefrom are believed to be in condition for immediate allowance.

Please note and that applicants have canceled claims that no longer properly depended from amended independent claim 1.

The present amendment is believed to be fully responsive to the Office action of June 19, 2002. Such Office action includes a restriction requirement, identifying claim 16 as being directed to an invention that is independent or distinct from the invention originally claimed. As discussed above, applicants have canceled such claim.

The Office action rejects claims 17-21 under 35 USC § 102(e) as being anticipated by NIELSEN. Applicants have canceled the rejected claims, rendering such rejection moot, and reconsideration and withdrawal of this rejection are therefore respectfully requested.

The Office action rejects claims 1-9 and 11-15 under 35 USC §103(a) as being unpatentable over NIELSEN in view of COUCH Jr. et al. The amendment of claim 1, discussed in both the foregoing remarks as well as the personal interview of August 29, 2002, is believed to overcome this rejection, and reconsideration and withdrawal of this rejection are therefore respectfully requested.

In light of the amendments described above and the arguments offered in support thereof, applicants believe that the present application is in condition for allowance and an early indication of the same is respectfully requested.

If the Examiner has any questions or requires further clarification of any of the above points, the Examiner may contact the undersigned attorney so that this application may continue to be expeditiously advanced.

Attached hereto is a marked-up version showing the changes made to the claims. The attached page is captioned "VERSION WITH MARKINGS TO SHOW CHANGES MADE."

Respectfully submitted,

YOUNG & THOMPSON

By



Eric Jensen
Attorney for Applicants
Registration No. 37,855
745 South 23rd Street
Arlington, VA 22202
Telephone: 703/521-2297

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VERSION WITH MARKINGS TO SHOW CHANGES MADE

Claim 1 has been amended as follows:

1. A method of cutting the workpiece made of stainless steel, coated steel, aluminum or aluminum alloy, comprising the steps of: [by the use of]

providing at least one transparent or reflecting optical means for focusing at least one laser beam, comprising a nozzle; [and of]

providing at least one assist gas [for said laser beam] to the nozzle under pressure; and [,]

cutting the workpiece with the laser beam;

[in which] wherein the optical means is of the multifocus type, the assist gas is [oxygen or] an oxygen/nitrogen mixture, and no gas other than the assist gas is supplied to the nozzle.